

# 12 Hunting Commandments

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I grew up in rural South Carolina, where hunting was more than a weekend-recreational outing. By the age of 10, I had more than a few active hunting seasons behind me. With each new season, my stepfather and uncles gave me more instruction. They instilled in me a respect for wildlife and for the lethality of firearms.

Many years have passed since those days of stalking the piney woods in Carolina. I have hunted for game, large and small, all across North America. And I take pride in the fact no one in my hunting party or I ever have had an “accident” in which someone was maimed or killed. I use that word because, in reality, most are mishaps that occur in the field and are preventable. In my mind, that qualifies them as mishaps.

I’ve avoided trouble by following a set of 12 rules—actually, I consider them commandments—of hunting safety. I want to share them so you, too, can enjoy the hunt without fear of having an accident. Here they are:

- 1 Firearms and alcohol or drugs (including the prescription kind) **DO NOT** mix.
- 2 Treat every firearm as if it is loaded.
- 3 Never point the muzzle of a gun at anything you don’t intend to shoot.
- 4 When hunting in a party, always point the muzzle in a safe direction.
- 5 Leave on the safety until you are ready to shoot.
- 6 Know your target and what is beyond your target.
- 7 Never give or take a firearm with the bolt or magazine action closed.



- 8 Never pick up a firearm by the muzzle.
- 9 If friends are with you, give your firearm to one of them before crossing obstacles.
- 10 Always check a barrel to make sure it’s clear before loading.
- 11 Before storing your firearm, do a sight-and-feel inspection of the chamber.
- 12 Never trust others to follow these rules; make sure they do. The life you save may be your own.

I have two sons who enjoy hunting and the outdoors. I accompanied the older one to a formal hunter-safety course and was happy to learn the instructors taught the same common-sense principles. This reinforcement was good for both of us. We hold each other, as well as all those we hunt with, accountable for these commandments.

Finally, I urge you to remember that the most valuable tool you have for guaranteeing everyone’s safety when hunting is between your ears. Use your head, watch the actions of fellow hunters, and correct them on the spot if you feel a situation is becoming dangerous. ■

*At the time he wrote this article, the author was an NFO and admin officer for the VAW-117 Wallbangers.*